



The River's Voice

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A publication of . . .

Kalamazoo River Cleanup Coalition

KRCC FORMED TO ADDRESS PCB REMOVAL AND DISPOSAL EFFORT

By Jeff Palmer

The grassroots coalition that blocked the dumping of PCB-laden river sediment in Kalamazoo has formally organized as the Kalamazoo River Cleanup Coalition (KRCC).

More than 50 people from Kalamazoo and Allegan counties helped to incorporate KRCC. A nominating committee proposed a slate of Board members and at a public meeting held at the Edison Neighborhood Association on June 15, confirmed the initial Board. Subsequently, the KRCC Board met and elected additional members and officers.

As stated in its articles of incorporation which have been filed with the State of Michigan, the KRCC is organized "to educate the public and work with all stakeholders to develop and im-



Children playing near Allied Site, next to the Portage Creek

Photo taken by Susan Andress

plement a collaborative regional strategy to clean up pollution and promote redevelopment of blighted areas of the entire Allied Paper, Inc./Portage Creek/Kalamazoo River Superfund area of concern."

KRCC president, Gary Wager, states the KRCC will

focus solely on the issues of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) within the Kalamazoo River Superfund site, a more than 80-mile stretch of river from Kalamazoo to Saugatuck, where the Kalamazoo River enters Lake Michigan.

The U.S. Centers for Dis-

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IDEAS ON HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE . . .

How can one person make a difference in vital efforts like KRCC? The following is a list of simple things anyone can do.

1. Join KRCC or other organizations that support the cleanup and remediation of the Kalamazoo River and surrounding areas.

2. Join EPA email list for Region 5 updates:

<http://www.epa.gov/region5/>

3. Read local newspapers and other publications for EPA update events.

4. Attend EPA Site Update meetings (usually held in Plainwell, Michigan).

5. Voice your concern.

Write the local newspaper, email letters, and speak out.

6. Talk to your neighbors and friends about the threat of PCBs in our community. Spread the word!

7. Write your governmental officials, City Commissioners, US Representatives, and State Senators:



Does It Make Sense To You?

Does it make sense to you?
To clean it all up.
Then fill it with muck?

Does it make sense to you?
To destroy the serene,
The beautiful green.

Does it make sense to you?
To destroy this place,
Where the animals pace.

Does it make sense to you?
To destroy the sight,
We see day and night.

Does it make sense to you?
To destroy it once more,
As it was just before.

Does it make sense to you?
To clean it all up,
Then fill it with muck.

Because it doesn't to me!

By Trey Swift

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ease Control has stated that PCBs are a proven cause of reproductive and neurological disorders in humans and animals, and a suspected cause of cancer.

"PCBs are a major health problem for all citizens and wildlife along the River. Our goal is to help negotiate a regional solution to what is clearly a regional problem of properly removing and disposing of PCB-laden material from the River."

Wager said key stakeholders in the effort include all who live, work, and play along the Kalamazoo River and should benefit from its restoration. "We intend to harness the political will and grassroots advocacy that was generated this spring and keep it going to find a practical long-term solution to the PCB problem."

KRCC will also engage in talks with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality

(MDEQ), other federal and state agencies, and two companies—Millennium Holdings and Georgia-Pacific—that are identified as the Potentially Responsible Parties (PRPs) in the Superfund cleanup process.

The former Allied Paper site and a three-mile stretch of the Portage Creek in Kalamazoo are included in the Superfund site. These, along with a series of dams and impoundments in Allegan County and other PCB "hotspots" along the River, will be the focal points of the KRCC effort.

According to KRCC Board Member Jason Novotny, the best chance at a successful restoration of any one site along the Kalamazoo River will come about through a collaborative, regional strategy that includes constructive, open dialog with the EPA, MDEQ, PRPs, and other key stakeholders in the public arena, Novotny, a Kalamazoo-based architect, added "any satis-

factory resolution and cleanup at the Allied site, the dams, impoundments, and other PCB-contaminated sites must occur in the context of a 'global solution' to the entire 80-mile Superfund site."

"Active members from anywhere along the superfund site are welcome as we shape our strategy for assuring a widely embraced, well-informed public position on the fate of lower Kalamazoo River watershed," said Novotny.



Photo taken by: Bethany Clay

MAKING THE CONNECTION

Many individuals feel disconnected from public leaders and institutions and don't believe they have the power to make a lasting difference in their community. The Chase Foundation released a publication in the Fall of 2007 titled, *Citizens at the Center: A New Approach to Civic Engagement*, which suggests that if people are going to get engaged and stay engaged in their communities, one thing must happen first—they must have more chances to connect with one another (including those they might disagree with) and figure out how they can work together for the common good.

In this spirit, KRCC asks:

How Has Being Involved with KRCC Changed You?

Margaret Burns writes:

Staying on top of the PCB cleanup has meant that I can look out at the beauty I see out of my kitchen window and not feel discouraged at its future. I see the many hued plants and trees and marvel that such beauty could belie the ugliness beneath its showy coat. The deer stroll across it without a care in the world except where to munch next.

Now I know there is a great future ahead for the Allied Site, more fishing, and CLEAR water for the Kalamazoo River. When I stood in front of the EPA and MDEQ representatives to convince them to allow joint partnership in the Remedial Investigation (RI) and Feasibility Study (FS) I did so believing in the crusade we had joined and the rightness of it. I remember Grandpa Ingersoll talking about fish-

ing the River and wishing it were still possible back in the 40's and 50's; if Grandpa could hear what's happening now, he'd know the future of the great River wasn't so bleak.

When the EPA and MDEQ responded positively to our negotiation stance of being partners in remediating the Allied Site, I definitely felt the term "progress."

Change is happening because we didn't give up but continued in the belief in the rightness of returning the earth to our Creator's specs and were willing to not demand so much as to explain and demonstrate our justifications. Letting go of past angst and being willing to be part of something new is paying off!

Find more community voices on Page 7!

WHATEVER IS A PCB?

By Margaret Burns

In this era of mounting acronyms, from medical diagnoses to sugar substitutes, it becomes easy to have one come into being without anyone having noticed or even understood from what it comes. They just sort of appear and assume the position of a real word, from which they can be bandied about as though everybody already knows what they mean with no questions asked. Acronyms can even seem to take on a life of their own. Anyone dealing with a governmental agency becomes well acquainted with an alphabet soup's worth of initials. Before that happens with this particular example of capitalized initials, we wanted to give you a clue as to what "PCB" means and why it has become important to us.

PCBs are the initials for polychlorinated biphenyls, a group of toxic chemicals which appear in nature naturally in very small quantities. However, when the concentration increases of this complex molecule with many chlorine atoms attached, the toxicity produces adverse health effects in animals, fish, and birds, as well as in human-kind. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control has stated that PCBs are a proven cause of reproductive and neurological disorders in humans and animals, and a suspected cause of cancer. There have been studies documenting these effects, and especially in Native American peoples who were found to

live on fish which were later found to be contaminated as they tend to build up in fatty tissue.

PCBs were largely produced in the United States between 1929 and 1978 as industrial coolants, insulators and lubricants with many different applications. While Kalamazoo was a successful paper manufacturing state they were used extensively, even in carbonless copy paper. The potential hazards for the environment and health weren't recognized or fully understood until the mid-70's; in 1977, the U.S. Government banned most uses for PCBs.

The PCB is a very stable molecule and not easily "taken apart" chemically. They adhere easily to organic material in sediment and soils. The same properties that made the PCBs so valuable to industry account for their continued presence in many areas, not just Kalamazoo.

So far, there hasn't been found an acceptable, cost effective means to eliminating excessive amounts other than shipping the material to a licensed reception site where some incineration can be safely done, though at nowhere near the rate required. This is why we have found PCBs to be an unacceptable property in the midst of Kalamazoo and along the Kalamazoo River in the concentrations in which they exist.

There are ways to restore contaminated property though there is no easy

nor inexpensive means. The newly established venue of the Allied Site Task Force (ASTF) working with the EPA and MDEQ and hopefully, in the near future, the PRPs (there are those acronyms again!) as a team to address the PCB issue at the Allied Site is a positive sign in moving forward to better our community.

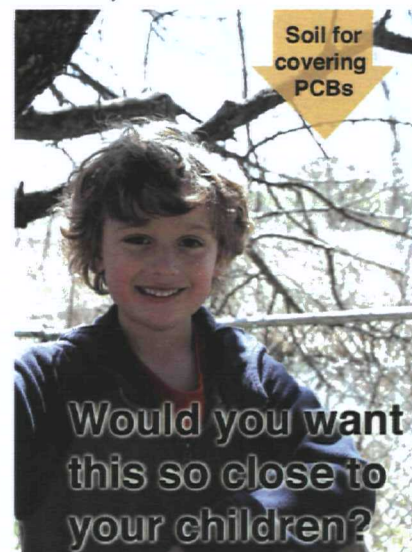


Photo taken by: Susan Andress

**I will drink the water.
I will swim in the water.
I will survive in the water.
I will dive in the water.
I will jump in the water.
I will slide in the water.
I will drop on someone's**

Making a Difference cont.

- tellupton@mail.house.gov
- sentgeorge@senate.michigan.gov
- US Senators Stabenow and Levin
senator@stabenow.senate.gov
senator@levin.senate.gov
- Governor Granholm
govdetail@michigan.gov
- State Representative Bob Jones
robertjones@house.mi.gov

8. Contact the MDEQ and MDNR about funding and Site Remediation issues.

These are just a few examples of things that just one person can do to start some changes and to make a difference. What will you do?



Photo taken by: Bethany Clay

CONCERNED RESIDENTS KEY TO KALAMAZOO RIVER VICTORY

This article was originally published in *The Connecting with Kalamazoo* newsletter. Special thanks to the City of Kalamazoo for permission to include this piece in KRCC's first newsletter!

Tenacity and perseverance played a big part in the decision made by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) not to dump PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) contaminants at the former Allied Paper site near the Kalamazoo River. Residents, City Commissioners, and City Administration showed the State and the Federal government the passion that we have to keep our community safe from harmful elements that threaten our quality of life. This victory is significant for our City and is due to the determination of the City Commission, the talents of our City staff, and the persistence of our residents.

The initial announcement by the EPA and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) in March that alarmed this community unified residents, City Commissioners, and City staff around a common theme—"Don't Dump On Us." City officials and residents were collectively astounded by the EPA's lack of prior communication and proposed plan to dump more harmful PCBs into the Kalamazoo River.

The initial objective of the former Allied Paper site, which borders three neighborhoods in Kalamazoo (Edison, Southside, and Milwood), was to temporarily stockpile contaminants until their removal and relocation to adequate landfills. The site was not suitable for the amount of dumping the EPA proposed, which most feared if carried out, would remove the likelihood that this "temporary" site would ever be cleaned up and revitalized for reuse. The EPA's plan was not an option for officials and residents throughout the County and their aggravation turned to advocacy, which ultimately overwhelmed State and Federal authorities.

Many meetings were held to discuss the long-term impact PCBs would have on our local environment. "EPA has clearly heard the concerns of Kalamazoo officials and residents," said Regional Administrator Mary Gade. Subsequently, EPA and MDEQ officials redeveloped a plan that would not include the former Allied Paper Landfill

as the designated site for dumping.

The current PCB dredging plan starts near the Plainwell section of the Kalamazoo River, which began in early June. The cleanup effort will occur over a two-year period and will cost approximately \$25 million. A cleanup agreement between the EPA, MDEQ, Georgia Pacific, and Millennium Holdings requires that sediments be removed from the Plainwell site and separated into two waste streams.

"This agreement allows more time to better address local concerns about disposal without further delaying the time-critical cleanup work at the Plainwell Impoundment," said Glade. PCBs with 50+ contaminant parts per million (ppm) will be sent to a landfill in Bellville, MI, currently equipped to receive and hold the materials. PCB sediment containing less than 50 ppm are considered non-hazardous and will be sent to the Allied Waste Landfill near Marshall, MI, also equipped to handle this type of waste. Disposal sites for 2008 are still being determined. However, the EPA has assured the community that the public will be consulted on future disposal options.

"I look forward to keeping an open dialogue with the community as we continue our efforts to restore the Kalamazoo River," said Stephen E. Chester, director of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.



Photo taken by: Bethany Clay

KRCC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Gary Wager—President
Jennifer Clark—Secretary
Michael Seals—Treasurer
Sarah Hill
Charles Ide
Jason Novotny
Bill Wykhuis
Jack C. Urban—Govt. Advisor

UPCOMING EVENTS/MEETINGS

KRCC General Meeting

Thursday, February 28, 2008

3:00 p.m.

Held at the Edison Neighborhood Association

All are welcome to come!

THE VOICES OF OUR FUTURE . . .

Our children have played—and will continue to play—a vital role in helping to keep adults in their community focused on assuring that the air and water they depend on is safe.

When news broke of the proposed PCB dumping in the heart of Kalamazoo, a number of community folks said, "What about those students in the Kalamazoo Public Schools who attend Edison Environmental Science Academy? They study the environment as part of the school's mission. What do they think?"

This past spring Kalamazoo Communities In Schools, in partnership with Homecrest Circle Neighborhood Association, had several visitors/poets meet with Ms. Sipes 3rd grade class from Edison school. There was no discussion of the proposed dumping plan; their mission was simple: capture the voices of students through poetry. Students were asked to share what they had learned from recently studying a unit on water. What did they know about water? What do we as a community need to know about water? They were also asked to imagine themselves "tiny enough to live inside a drop of water" and then write a poem.

Through their poetry, their voices have since been shared with our community. Names have been withheld and are simply referred to as "Voices from Ms. Sipes 3rd Grade Class at Edison Environmental Science Academy". A few examples are shared here in our newsletter.

The individual poems that came out the special class presentation were handed out at the first "Fighting PCBs with Poetry" event in the Milwood neighborhood. A five year old boy passed out a water poem to each person who walked through the doors of NaDean's Coffee Place where the event was held. The audience in attendance that evening was informed that the poem they held in their hands would not be read. That the only way the voices of children could be heard was if adults stood up and helped them. These poems were meant to be shared and passed on.



In May, Principal Chuck Tansey accepted the invitation to kick off the second "Fighting PCBs with Poetry" which was hosted by FIRE, located in the Edison neighborhood. Before the reading, Principal Tansey spoke about the school, its environmental focus, and most importantly, the children and families it serves. "We are all about making a difference

WHAT I WANT YOU TO KNOW ABOUT WATER

The following is a group poem by Ms. Sipes 3rd grade class at Edison Environmental Science Academy.

What I know about water is—
It's a liquid.
It freezes at 32 degrees or 0 degrees centigrade.
It runs through sewers.
Water goes in the creek and in the dirt.
Water is used to make electricity.

What I want you to know about water is—
Water is a good thing.
You can drink it.
You can bathe in it.
Water is H₂O
What you need to know about water is—
You need to learn about water.
You need water.
You need to pay your water bill.
Ms. Sipes 3rd grade class drinks H₂O.
You need H₂O to be healthy.

Water is good for you.
Ice cubes are made of water.
Fish need water.

We all need water to survive.

at Edison," he said. Students acted upon their desire to do more when it came to the PCB issue and many wrote passionate letters to the EPA and local officials to let them know of their concerns. Principal Tansey is right. Edison is about making a difference. Every day teachers are instructing and students are learning. We owe it to these, our children—and children everywhere—to take a few minutes, be it each day, each week, or each month—to let our voices be heard on the PCB issue. We can not, as everyday citizens throughout Allegan and Kalamazoo County, afford to let the PCB problem dissipate once more into oblivion. We must continue to speak up. Our children deserve no less from us.



LOCAL GROUP FORMED TO EXPLORE ALLIED SITE OPTIONS

By Gary Wager, KRCC President

The board of directors of the Kalamazoo River Cleanup Coalition wrote a letter this past September to the Environmental Protection Agency, requesting community involvement in site pollution cleanup and redevelopment planning. The letter generated a response from EPA Mike Berkhoff, who proposed a meeting in Plainwell, on November 6, one day before a scheduled open house, regarding progress at the Plainwell dredging project.

KRCC president, Gary Wager contacted Kalamazoo River Watershed Council director, Jeff Spoelstra, to ask that local environmental, community development, and city/county government representatives be invited to convene prior to the EPA meeting, in order to discuss potential outcomes at the Allied site.

Two meetings were conducted, with around 25 representatives from KRCC, KRWC, Coalition for Urban Renewal, Kalamazoo Environmental Council, Kalamazoo River Protection Association, City of Kalamazoo, Heritage Hills Neighborhood Association, ISAAC, Kalamazoo Regional Chamber of Commerce, and Kalamazoo County attending one or both sessions. This group decided on the name Allied Site

Task Force (ASTF), and drafted a response letter to send to Mike Berkhoff and other EPA Region 5 officials as a preface to the proposed meeting.

A selected group of 8 members of the ASTF met on November 6 with EPA project coordinators Mike Berkhoff, Jim Saric, and community involvement coordinator, Don DeBlasio, to map out a process of negotiating community planning as part of the EPA process for cleaning up pollution and to discuss future redevelopment options at the Allied site.

ASTF co-spokespersons, Jeff Spoelstra (KRWC) and Margaret Burns (KRCC, Heritage Hills) gave brief statements regarding overall concerns of nearby residents and Kalamazoo community organizations, ranging from public well field contamination, to eventual revitalization plans for the Allied site.

EPA Mike Berkhoff outlined the federal Superfund process, and agreed to include ASTF in reviewing the proposed Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study for the Allied Site. Remedial Project Manager, Jim Saric, re-iterated his view of the desirability of incorporating community input in the pollution cleanup and re-

talization of the site. Mr. Berkhoff also agreed to hold the next meeting in Kalamazoo, and to invite representatives of the Potentially Responsible Parties to join in discussing options.

In contrast to some previous exchanges between concerned citizens and EPA representatives, the meeting was, for the most part, non-confrontational. The emphasis was on a collaborative process that includes a diverse group of stakeholders working together to create the best possible outcome for the Allied site. The goal of this collaborative effort is two-fold: create the best possible outcome at the Allied site, and provide a model for future negotiations in 2008 and beyond, in downstream projects of the Allied Paper Inc. / Portage Creek / Kalamazoo River Superfund cleanup project.

"People don't understand that not only can they make a difference, it's their responsibility to do so."

Florence Robinson



MAKING MORE CONNECTIONS . . .

More community voices answer the question: How Has Being Involved with KRCC Changed You?

Connie Janik writes: I've met so many great people who each have a little piece of the solution to this problem. To see everyone organize and take action, has been inspiring. It has moved it all forward so powerfully. Also, being involved allows me to learn from others, to not feel powerless in the face of a complex problem--not that this problem has been completely solved--but I think we can all see how we can keep our community somewhat protected by awareness and action.

Lessons Learned

By Jennifer Clark

We can not afford
to drift away
to go back to pretending

that we can return to the way things were
that we can live fully and well
with neighbors we don't bother to know
with neighborhoods we don't care to visit

We can not afford
to live the myth
that community is ancient history

This fight for environmental justice
has etched our soul
river spirit has entered in

for it is only
in restoring the river
we shall save ourselves

We can not afford
to drift away
to go back to pretending

Bruce Merchant writes: The environment is a vital element to vibrant neighborhoods that make up the City of Kalamazoo. The Kalamazoo River Cleanup Coalition (KRCC) has been instrumental in energizing citizen involvement in getting the US EPA's attention regarding the clean up of the old Allied Disposal site. As important, however, is the continued involvement of the KRCC in ensuring that viable solutions are sought regarding cleanup of the entire Kalamazoo River and redevelopment of brownfield sites within the City. It has been a pleasure to work with so many energetic and engaged citizens."

Trey Swift, 14, writes: The PCB clean up issue made me realize how many people care about our community, how we all came together. People, neighbors I've never seen before came out to defend our community. People who never spoke up on the issue, spoke up...and we let everyone know what we wanted.

It feels good to know that I am a part of affecting people to make a difference. Most people overlook kids but kids can help. We can make a difference if we speak up and let everyone know what we think should happen in our community and environment."

How has the PCB issue changed me? I'm not as nervous talking in front of groups. I used to be shy, freeze up, but not anymore. The experience of reading my poems at NaDean's Coffee shop has opened me up.

"The greatest mistake is to do nothing
because you can only do a little."
—Sydney Smith

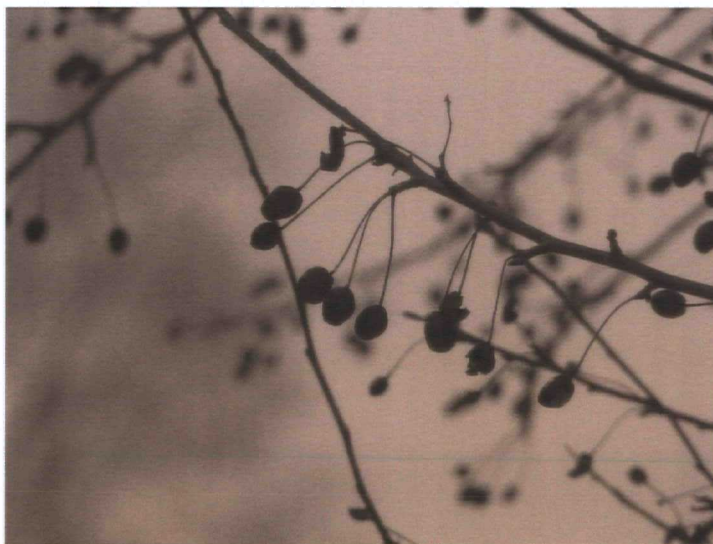


Photo taken by: Bethany Clay

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Kalamazoo River Cleanup

The Kalamazoo River Cleanup Coalition is a not-for-profit organization committed to working with all stakeholders to develop and support a viable plan to clean up the entire Allied Site, Inc./Portage Creek/Kalamazoo River Superfund Site.

COMING SOON . . .
WWW.KRCC.ORG



WHAT CAN I DO? TAKE THE PCB CHALLENGE

Recent events have awakened us, everyday citizens, to the PCB challenge. Citizens organized. We organized ourselves through RESPECT. We organized ourselves by creating the Kalamazoo Environmental Justice Coalition. We organized ourselves through surrounding neighborhood associations, particularly through the Homecrest Circle, Edison, Milwood, Oakwood, Westnedge, Edgemoor, and Bronson (WEB) Neighborhood Associations. We educated ourselves on superfund issues and over 300 of us attended the PCB Forum held in April at Western Michigan University. We opened up our homes and organized. We held meetings in our garages. We made posters and signs. We worked alongside the city of Kalamazoo. We connected with our elected officials to let them know

that we care about the PCB issue. We marched, rallied, we spoke in one voice.

We all did a little something. We must learn from this tremendous lesson—that if we all do a little something, those little ‘somethings’ will add up to a lot of difference.

We ask only a little of you. Take a little time to read your quarterly KRCC newsletter. Keep alert and demand a global solution to the PCB challenge. A little of your time now will make a difference for the future of our river and our children.